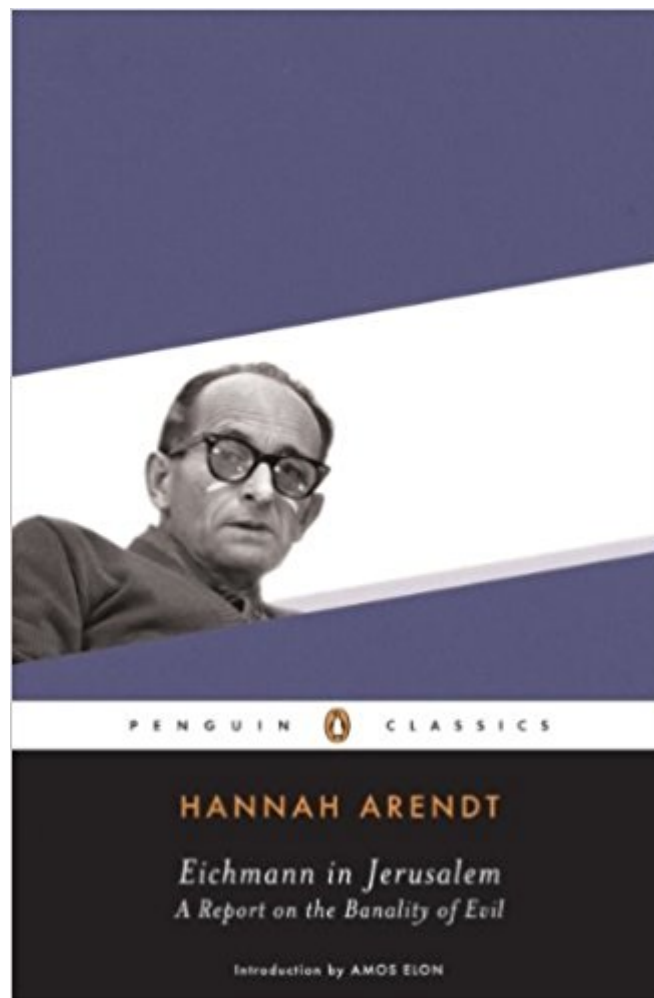




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# Eichmann In Jerusalem: A Report On The Banality Of Evil (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

The controversial journalistic analysis of the mentality that fostered the Holocaust, from the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* — Sparking a flurry of heated debate, Hannah Arendt's authoritative and stunning report on the trial of German Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann first appeared as a series of articles in *The New Yorker* in 1963. This revised edition includes material that came to light after the trial, as well as Arendt's postscript directly addressing the controversy that arose over her account. A major journalistic triumph by an intellectual of singular influence, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is as shocking as it is informative — an unflinching look at one of the most unsettling (and unsettled) issues of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While living in Argentina in 1960, Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped and smuggled to Israel where he was put on trial for crimes against humanity. The *New Yorker* magazine sent Hannah Arendt to cover the trial. While covering the technical aspects of the trial, Arendt also explored the wider themes inherent in the trial, such as the nature of justice, the behavior of the Jewish leadership during the Nazi regime, and, most controversially, the nature of Evil itself. Far from being evil incarnate, as the prosecution painted Eichmann, Arendt maintains that he was an average man, a petty bureaucrat interested only in furthering his career, and the evil he did came from the seductive power of the totalitarian state and an unthinking adherence to the Nazi cause. Indeed, Eichmann's only defense during the trial was "I was just following orders." Arendt's analysis

of the seductive nature of evil is a disturbing one. We would like to think that anyone who would perpetrate such horror on the world is different from us, and that such atrocities are rarities in our world. But the history of groups such as the Jews, Kurds, Bosnians, and Native Americans, to name but a few, seems to suggest that such evil is all too commonplace. In revealing Eichmann as the pedestrian little man that he was, Arendt shows us that the veneer of civilization is a thin one indeed. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

“Brilliant and disturbing.” • Stephen Spender, The New York Review of Books  
“Profound . . . This book is bound to stir our minds and trouble our consciences.” • Chicago Tribune  
“Deals with the greatest problem of our time . . . the problem of the human being within a modern totalitarian system.” • Bruno Bettelheim, The New Republic

Everybody who wants to try to understand how human beings can treat one another with cruel indifference or outright hatred should read this book. It's part of all of us. We are one creature multiplied seven billion times. Only by understanding that can you both understand someone like Eichmann or how insanely irrational is racism. A lot of Jews didn't like this book which seemed to them to both let Eichmann off the hook to some extent and to question the legal process. (There should be no doubt that the whole business of kidnapping him and trying him in that way wasn't any kind of model for jurisprudence). Arendt says he was as guilty as hell and deserved to die. Those of us that live in place where the state no longer takes people's lives wouldn't agree with the execution but her opinion is fair enough in context. (Ironic to think of the victims getting some sort of closure from death. Eye for an eye I suppose.) The point is, nobody really comes up smelling of roses in this book which is probably why some people don't like it. SPOILER ALERT What Arendt found in that court in Israel was that Eichmann was an ordinary, boring and unexceptional man who ended up in charge of part of the Holocaust machine because he was one of the few Nazi's who had even read a book about Zionism. He was the expert! It's so dumb it's numbing. Eichmann was almost certainly autistic as well but it is too soon to talk about the possible intellectual/psychiatric issues of various Nazis, including those of Hitler. At least a hundred years too soon to humanise them and understand what they taught us about ourselves.

I had just read "Hunting Eichmann" by Neal Bascomb. Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased Down the World's Most Notorious Nazi "Eichmann

in Jerusalem" is a chilling sequel. It is chilling because of the details you learn about how the Germans handled the "Jewish problem" in the 1930's and 40's. The book is instructive in just the way the title suggests - how a society can take the murdering of millions of people to the banal, the administrative and the ordinary. Hannah Arendt is exacting and detailed. She is a gifted journalist and an insightful philosopher. Unlike many journalists and philosophers of the day, she is absolutely committed to the truth. You must read this book if you wonder how the death camps could have happened. How could the thousands of people who were complicit have complied? How could this "project" have been so unbelievably effective? (!!)

Arendt takes the reader through the political climate surrounding the trial, the testimony at the trial, Eichmann's own mental machinations, and the euphemisms that were employed to "explain" the actions of the Third Reich. Witness an exchange during the trial: Judge: "Dr Servatius, I assume you made a slip of the tongue when you said that killing by gas was a medical matter." To which Servatius replied: "It was indeed a medical matter since it was prepared by physicians, it was a matter of killing, and killing, too, is a medical matter." There is much to learn in this small book about how the extermination was organized (with the assistance of Jewish Judenrate) and how the trial was conducted. Arendt is intensely objective in her coverage, and for that she has been criticized for being anti-Jew, or pro-Eichmann. Neither of these is the case at all! Arendt's disinterested coverage of the trial, its circumstances and its outcome, gives the reader a "fresh" look at that era and the best possible insight into how this monstrosity unfolded, and how it all too easily could unfold again.

This is a masterpiece if only because it is a historical document of great importance that has a great deal of depth as well. This is philosopher Hannah Arendt's famous (I only found out about it recently) reporting for the New Yorker on the trials of Adolf Eichmann, the man singly in charge of coordinating the exterminations of Jews during WWII for the Nazi Party, and as such Adolf Hitler. The detail regarding Hitler is crucial because as one of the key points that Ms. Arendt pointed out, was that evil didn't consist in maniacal character structure or even behavior: it could rather be inherent in a person's refusal to think, to use his/her powers of judgment. For Eichmann, Hitler was the end all be all, and to do his job was to follow orders and nothing more. As it turns out these trials were extremely controversial in their time, they took place in Jerusalem where Eichmann had been taken with painstaking complications, by force and without diplomatic intervention. And there is more, how Arendt angered mostly American Jewry by pointing to the compliance of some of the more powerful German Jews. As a Jew, as a psychotherapist, as a person, I feel grateful to have landed on this book (it was after I watched the film "Hannah Arendt"), and feel safe in

recommending it to anyone who wants to learn from history, and to--let us hope--think about it.

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